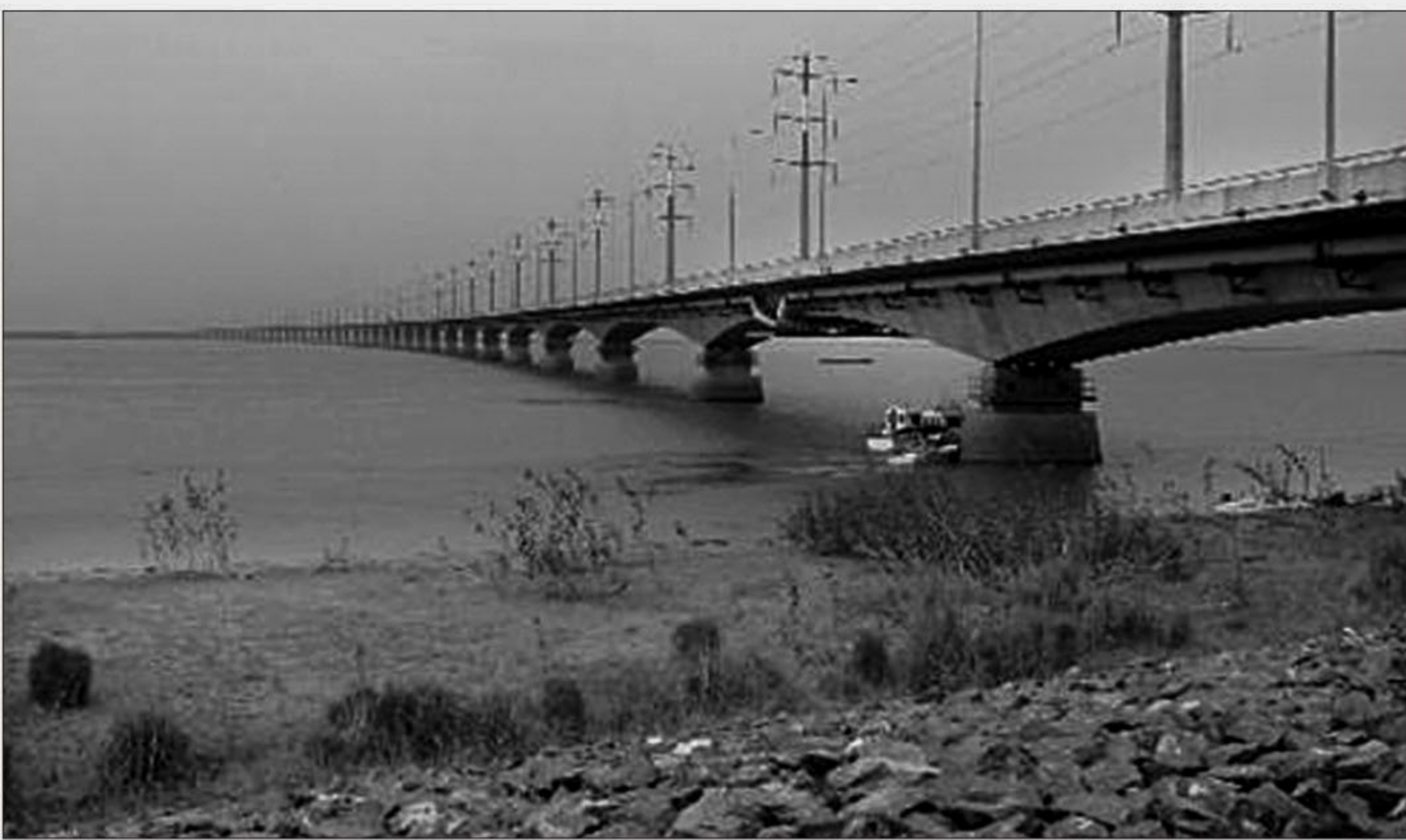


## Exclusive rail bridge for goods transportation



Railway operation over the Jamuna Bridge has already reached its optimum level. Unless the above proposals for infrastructure development are considered, no further increase in number of trains over the bridge will be possible. If we wish to see the dream of a developed Bangladesh come to reality, we must attach top most priority on it.

MD. ABDUL WAHAB

THE Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge (Bangabandhu Bridge) has already proved its worth in the transport sector as well as economic development of Bangladesh. It connects the network of the eastern and western parts of Bangladesh Railway (BR). During FY 2009-10, Bangladesh Railway operated 7,250 passenger trains and carried over 56 lakh passengers, while 270 goods trains transported about 2,50,000 metric tons of cargo.

The demand for running more passenger trains as well as pressure for carrying larger volume of freight traffic is increasing. But how much traffic can Bangladesh Railway bear?

Railway operation across the existing bridge is handicapped by a number of limiting factors, such as:

- Speed restriction to 20 kph (initially the prescribed speed was 40 kph, but after cracks developed, train speed was reduced to 20 kph);
- Maximum uniformly distributed load (UDL) allowed is 43.7 kilo newton per metre. Indian wagons and BR BG wagons with full payload have higher UDL, and are not allowed to cross the bridge. Special wagons with heavy axle loads are also restricted;

- Regulations restricting dead engines with trains, double engines on a single train, attaching cranes, special type wagons, non-vacuum wagons etc.;
- Special safety check of all trains before boarding the bridge, which causes loss of 15 to 20 minutes.

Sectional capacity means the number of trains that can run in 24 hours on a section of railway line. The above-mentioned limiting factors, especially the compulsory speed restriction and safety checks before running on to the bridge, have reduced sectional capacity on the bridge. As per thumb rule calculation of sectional capacity about 22 trains a day can run on the bridge, against which 22 to 24 trains are running daily.

As a matter of practice, when the sectional capacity reaches 80% steps are taken to increase it by increasing train speed, splitting up longer block sections into shorter ones, converting single line into double line, improving signalling system etc.

But there is no scope to apply any of these measures to increase the sectional capacity on the bridge, which means that the number of trains crossing the bridge cannot be increased further. Any attempt to run more trains in the existing scenario will lead to serious train-jams on both sides of the bridge, with loss of time and threat to safety.

At present, one pair of passenger trains are running over the bridge, of which 1 pair is international (Moitree Express), 9 pairs are intercity and one pair is a mail train. Seating capacity of these trains together is 13,000, but the actual passenger figure is above 18,000 per day. These trains are in high demand, and many passengers travel without seats. There is pressing demand for running an intercity train from Rangpur to Dhaka.

People of Lalmonirhat demand one more intercity train for Dhaka. Similar demand has been raised by Chilahati, Thakurgaon/Panchagarh, Khulna, Bogra/Santahar etc. There is a proposal to link Bogra and Sirajganj by constructing a new metre gauge line. If this link is established there will be further demand for Dhaka bound trains.

Taking all these together, at least 10 more passenger trains will have to run over the bridge. On the plea of shortage of coaches and engines no step is being taken to increase trains, but with procurement of new coaches and engines demands will be pressed hard for fulfillment.

On average, one goods train runs daily over the bridge at present, but there is demand for increasing this number to at least 4 trains daily. Potential goods traffic may include stone from Madhyapara hard rock mine (present demand is 2.25 lakh metric ton), government food grains (monthly average 20,000 metric ton), fuel oil (monthly average 10,000 metric ton), fertiliser and other commodities. Against these demands BR can carry only 12,000 metric tons per month.

Demand for carrying more traffic is forthcoming. The untapped coal reserve of Phulbari is a potential source of future rail traffic. The EPZs in the western part of the country are being rail linked. India, in addition to traditional cargo in covered wagons, has offered

container trains over the bridge to Dhaka.

A large variety of Indian goods flow into Bangladesh via Darsana, Rohanpur and Benapole rail routes. Since Indian wagons are not allowed on the bridge, this traffic goes to Nawapara (Jessore), Ullapara and Sirajganj, and after unloading, the goods are transported to the eastern parts of the country by road.

Had there been no restriction on the bridge, this traffic could move directly to different destinations around Dhaka at a lower cost. There is a proposal for re-opening of Radhikapur-Birol interchange route after converting the metre gauge line between Parbatipur-Birol into dual gauge, and re-establishing the missing link between Chilahati (Bangladesh) and Haldibari (India).

Considering all these traffic potentials, the number of goods train movement will increase manifold in the near future. This is more so in the context of ongoing initiatives for regional rail connectivity through Trans Asian Railway (TAR) and settlement of the transit issue with India, Nepal and Bhutan. It may be mentioned that proposed rail corridors for TAR and transit routes will cross over the Jamuna Bridge.

The future traffic potential for BR, as stated above, is tremendous, and so is the magnitude of the challenge. But BR, as it stands now, is far below the required level to face the colossal challenge. Immediate attention of the government is needed for development of railway infrastructures for fulfillment of transport needs of the people and efficient handling of cross-Jamuna goods traffic. The focus of development projects must be on:

- Building a dedicated rail bridge on the Jamuna river by the side of the existing bridge. (It will be cost effective as river training works will not be required.);
- Converting the single line track from Tongi to Ishurdi into double line;
- Splitting long block sections between Joydevpur-Jamtoil by constructing a new B class (crossing) station in the middle of each block section;
- Constructing a 3rd line (2nd loop line) at all crossing stations between Joydevpur and Ishurdi.

Infrastructure development for railway involves huge investment. A study conducted by ADB reveals that during the first 5 years of the railway infrastructure development process initial investment required will be Tk.24,000 crores and probable return will be Tk.350 crores p.a., which will rise to Tk.7,000 crores annually.

Besides transportation of inter-country traffic, carrying of local traffic will increase and contribute to overall economic growth of the country (Prothom Alo, June 22). Hence, even if the initial investment is high the future benefit is higher.

Railway operation over the Jamuna Bridge has already reached its optimum level. Unless the above proposals for infrastructure development are considered, no further increase in number of trains over the bridge will be possible. If we wish to see the dream of a developed Bangladesh come to reality, we must attach top most priority on it.

MD. ABDUL WAHAB is the Chief Operating Superintendent/West Bangladesh Railway, Rajshahi.

## Student politics haunts us

And once a large part of the student society is driven to the brink of violence and destruction, general people no longer rely on them. As they verge on delinquency they can't raise their voices in unison against the corruption and moral degradation within the political parties.

SUBIR DAS

THE ongoing vandalism perpetrated by the student wings of political parties is shaking the very foundation of our national ethos. The grimmest doom falling upon us is that a section of the student community is ready to respond to the urging of political parties. But the question is "why"? The most rational answer would be that political posts are like the velvet rabbit, which beckons those students and drives them crazy to take part in battle for supremacy in institutions.

Journalists, devoted to people's right to know, have been writing reports, along with photographs, on clashes between political wings. Unfortunately, those culprits are hardly brought to justice. The government hardly launches crackdown on vandalism committed by the student wings.

It's not an easy task to rid the nation of the ongoing clashes between student wings of political parties. And once a large part of the student society is driven to the brink of violence and destruction, general people no longer rely on them. As they verge on delinquency, they can't raise their voices in unison against the corruption and moral degradation within the political parties.

We have reached an impasse. People are urging a ban on student politics in order to restore harmony in the campus. The cornerstone of their argument is that if the ban is imposed, the student wings will lose their recognition as being a part of political parties. Will the ban be the ultimate solution?

If a moratorium on student politics is imposed, the student wings will find different names for their organisations and keep up violence. In the guise of non-political organisations, the student wings will continue to trigger unrest in educational institutions. The government can easily shirk its responsibility of taming the demons taking part in vandalism, as they will not be affiliated with any political party.

If the perpetrators are brought to justice and given exemplary punishment, the educational institutions will surely be rid of political clashes. In spite of photographs of the vandals being regularly published in the newspapers, the government is nonchalant about bringing them to justice. It's shocking that we can't summon up courage to stand against those vandals, even though they are not many in number.

However, it is difficult to disentangle the skein of problems and come up with solutions. Let us try to trace back the present scenario of student politics to cultural circumstances. Students need a common platform in order to share their views, ideas and visions. Cultural practice is the paramount issue that can keep the students away from delinquency and violence. Initiatives taken by organisations to gear up cultural activities and voluntary works should be welcome. It's a tricky issue, when somebody moves away from constructive thought he usually resorts to destructive activities.

Pro-active and research based studies can produce a breakthrough in eradicating clashes between political groups in campuses. It's very natural that a student will become frustrated if he finds no way to implement the knowledge he has acquired over the years. This frustration may influence him to opt for something destructive.

Bridging the gap between teachers and students may be an efficacious approach to solving the problem. Teachers should come forward to ameliorate the situation by ratcheting up interaction with students through cultural and research-based activities. Does our expectation square with the real scenario? The conjecture is that some teachers also can't escape the grip of political grouping.

The teachers could have taken more down to earth steps in dealing with political and non-political violence in campuses. This statement may be backed up with some evidence. After some students of BUET went on rampage, demanding suspension of classes for watching World Cup Football, the university authority immediately suspended classes and vacated dormitories for an indefinite time.

But BUET remained closed even a week after the World Cup Football was over. Why? It proves that the authority is ready to close the university but reluctant to open it for the welfare of students.

Violence begets violence. It reminds me of the famous saying, "an eye for an eye makes the world blind." The existing practice of mud slinging and violence committed by the cynical political parties also gripped their student wings, and the legerdemain working behind campus violence hardly comes to the spotlight. It's high time to extirpate the demons from the campus and restore harmony in educational institutions. But who will be the exorcist?

Subir Das is a student, Department of Naval Architecture and Marine engineering, BUET.

## A Japanese apology for Korea

Naoto Kan, the prime minister of Japan, recently expressed his "deep remorse" and "heartfelt apology" for Japan's past colonial rule in Korea and vowed to build a bilateral relationship oriented to the future.

MONZURUL HUQ

IT was 100 years ago that the invading Japanese forces landed in Korea and forced the local authorities to sign a treaty under which the Korean peninsula became subject to Japanese occupation. The occupation lasted for 35 years, much less in duration compared to the occupation of territories by Western colonial empires of the time.

However, this short Japanese occupation left a bitter taste, resulting in long lasting distrust and misunderstanding between the two neighbours, the fallouts of which are still being felt on both sides across the Sea of Japan.

It was not the first time that Japan invaded and occupied foreign territories; and it was also not the last time for the emerging military power of the East to launch an assault with the aim of fulfilling the long cherished desire of having its own colony.

The Ryukyu Kingdom, which is now known as Okinawa, was first to come under direct Japanese subjugation, soon after the new ruling elites of Japan that came to power following the Meiji restoration of 1868 set an ambitious goal of catching up with western colonial empires. This was promptly followed by the annexation of Taiwan after the Sino-Japanese war of 1895.

Grabbing of territories beyond the country's national borders increased the hunger for Japanese ruling elites. This hunger for getting hold of land far and beyond was soon followed by the desire of implementing a system in occupied territories, whereby the people of those colonies under Japanese domination would "learn" the to modernise the backwaters that they had been living in for centuries by following the example of Japan.

The Ryukyu Kingdom became an integral part of Japan in 1879, and in Taiwan the Japanese occupation did bring a few positive

gains to the extent that some people in the territory still think that coming under Japanese domination was not too bad an option at a time when rival powers were all vying for getting a foothold in surrounding areas.

Both of those territories, the Ryukyu Kingdom and Taiwan, had been loosely connected to China as being vassal states of the Chinese monarchy; whereas the Korean peninsula was an independent entity ruled by the Chosen Dynasty. This makes the occupation of Korea by the Japanese forces significantly different in nature than those of earlier occupations. Resistance to Japanese occupation was much stronger in Korea than in other places until the Imperial Japanese Army started to move deep inside Chinese territories during the second half of 1930s.

The Korean peninsula still carries the legacy of Japanese colonialism in the form of a divided country. The bulk of the resistance, being influenced by Marxist ideology, ended up in the North, whereas many of those who actively supported Japanese occupation later joined hands with the US forces and formed the core of the leadership that ruled the South well until a democratic order was established, ending a long dictatorial legacy.

There are a number of issues related to Japanese colonial domination that annoyed Koreans for very long, and many in the country hoped for a better understanding from the Japanese about the sufferings they had to endure when the country was ruled by Japan until the end of World War II.

Hundreds and thousands of Koreans were sent to Japan, many against their wishes, where they were compelled to work as cheap labour in factories and mines. And when the war started, many were drafted and sent to the war front to fight for Japan. Koreans also complain that they were forced to adopt Japanese names and were forbidden to use their own language. Beyond

these allegations, there also remains the unresolved issue of comfort women, who were forced to work as prostitutes deployed to entertain Japanese soldiers.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the beginning of Japanese occupation in Korea. Since Japan and South Korea in recent years have forged closer ties on economic and political levels, many expected a more conciliatory approach on the part of Japan concerning the history.

In line with such expectations, Naoto Kan, the prime minister of Japan, recently expressed his "deep remorse" and "heartfelt apology" for Japan's past colonial rule in Korea and vowed to build a bilateral relationship oriented to the future. Addressing a press conference after the statement was released, the Japanese prime minister also reiterated that Japan would transfer to South Korea historic Korean assets that Japan's Imperial Household Agency is currently holding.

To many in Japan, Kan's apology sounded similar to the deep remorse expressed by the former Japanese Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama in the mid 1990s. Murayama's statement, though not addressed to any specific country or nation, could somehow appease China and South Korea, the countries that are most outspoken critics -- along with North Korea -- of Japan's reluctant attitude towards its past mistakes. The media and the government in South Korea welcomed the statement and hoped that the pledges would not remain only on paper.

The timing of the apology was a difficult one for the ruling Democratic Party of Japan as the anniversary falls soon after party's disastrous performance at the Upper House election of the Japanese Diet. As support for the party and the cabinet keeps plummeting amid economic stagnation and indecision of the government over a number of crucial issues, many within the ruling party also expressed reservation over the text of the announcement, while for the main opposition it provided another opportunity of targeting the government for failing to meet the aspiration of citizens.

And to Japan's extreme right that still dreams of a mighty and powerful Japan dominating

over the Asian continent, the statement is seen as a shameful document that needs to be annulled and discarded. However, the prime minister decided to go ahead with the release of this important statement well ahead of the anniversary of the end of World War II, that falls on August 15, probably with the idea that, though addressed to Koreans, it would send a message to China as well that Japan is now ready to look forward with an open mind.

As I was coming out of the official residence of prime minister after attending the press conference where he focused on the announcement that was released earlier on the day, I could get an understanding of the feeling of Japan's nationalist forces that see the announcement as a sign of betrayal to national pride.

Loudspeakers placed on top of vehicles were proclaiming Naoto Kan a traitor who gave in to the interests of outsiders, thus tainting the image of Japan as a leading nation in the world. Listening to those angry voices, I wondered whether they still cherished the desire of leading a life dreaming about the "glorious" days of Japan when much of East and Southeast Asia came under Japanese domination, without recognising the fact that those "glorious" days also led Japan to a dead end that eventually resulted in a humiliating defeat.

How we look at our past is not always an innocent game of remembering what happened in those bygone days. The past also fuels anger and grudges if past mistakes are not corrected and addressed properly. There is nothing wrong in apologising for the mistakes of our predecessors if it paves the way for a better understanding.

However, in politics, there is hardly any room for a conciliatory approach at a time when things do not go well. And we know that in Japan the deepening economic woes are being increasingly felt by ordinary citizens as a prolonged recession hangs above like a thick cloud. No doubt that, in such a situation, some would always resort to whatever glory the past holds, as if to justify that hanging on to the past would lead the nation out of its present misery.

Monzurul Huq writes from Japan.

